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From the Congressional Record

Senator Craig Praises President Bush's Education Initiative

The following excerpts were taken from remarks in the Congressional Record made by Senate Republican Policy Committee Chairman Larry Craig on January 23, 2001, as the Senate prepared to receive the President's blueprint for education reform.

Let me join in the bipartisan chorus of voices here on the floor this morning speaking about education reform and the package that President Bush will be sending us for our examination and consideration in the coming days. I say a chorus of bipartisan voices. Every Senator who serves in the Senate recognizes and is willing to dedicate time to the importance of education in our Nation, and especially to the improvement of our public educational system.

Are there differences? Sure, there are differences. Historically, many of our colleagues simply wanted to send money, wanted to send it down from the Federal level, arguing that money was the problem; that if enough was sent, it would resolve the issue. A good many of us have said: Now, wait a moment. There has to be some control and some measurement, some evaluation of achievement. Or is the money being spent in the right way? Is enough control being given at the State and local level?

Over the years, while the Federal Government has participated in a fairly limited way in the public education systems of our country. For every dollar that is spent on the ground in Idaho or Mississippi or Texas or Illinois, only about 7 or 8 cents of that dollar has been a Federal amount.

What George Bush brings to us today is an attempt to recognize what most Americans have already recognized and spoke to him about in the campaign. That is that our educational system is in need of improvement and in need of reform. And probably out of opinions from that side of the aisle and this side of the aisle, there is a strong common ground to allow that kind of improvement and reform to go forward.

Hopefully in the days to come, we will be able to craft a package, working with our President, to achieve what most Americans want for their children, recognizing, as

all of us do, that in the absence of a high-quality public education system, the very character of our Nation, that must be perpetuated and brought forward from generation to generation, begins to lose. If that happens, America loses. In the end, we are a lesser nation because our children—our future leaders—are simply not as prepared as they must be to compete amongst themselves and to compete in the world as we know it.

That is the issue George Bush challenges us with today. He speaks of putting money in for reading, but he also speaks of accountability. He turns that accountability back to the States and to the local communities. . . . Good schools will improve and bad schools will work to improve, but for bad schools that will not recognize their failing, we will give parents and students the option to move elsewhere.

Now, public education is a monopoly. It always has been one. Many of the educators within that system want to keep it just that way. They do not want to have to measure up against the private sector or another school down the road. If you live in that school district, you are required to attend that school. What George Bush is saying is, not necessarily. So you do not have to be a prisoner within the educational system. If the educational system is going to educate, then the parent and the student—if they are not getting the quality of education they want—ought to be allowed and ought to be given the means to move to another school where that quality education exists.

Of course, there will also be consequences for success, not just for failure. If schools improve overall student achievement, they will be rewarded with special grants and bonuses.

The President's plan provides the right blend of parental empowerment, local flexibility, federal funding, and accountability. If enacted, this plan will go a long way towards giving every child in America a chance to truly succeed.

There are a lot of issues to be dealt with in the coming days. A good deal of compromise is to be made. But I am extremely excited that our President, President Bush, is leading with this issue. Clearly, there is no question in our country it is a major issue, and a major issue of importance for all of us, but most importantly for the future of our country.

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